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ABSTRACT

In schools today, tests are being used for a variety of reasons, such as an indication of school accountability and also to track students, label them, or place them in specialized programs. Excessive dependence on test outcomes can adversely effect students' educational goals and contribute to their disengagement from education, because (among other factors) students are not helped to understand the value of education. One approach to solve this dilemma is for all educational stakeholders to work in close collaboration by fulfilling such responsibilities as ensuring that parents understand that students come to school ready and willing to learn, parents build their children's confidence and self-esteem, teachers use varied methods of instruction and assessment, administrators provide incentives to stimulate learning, community members serve as student mentors and tutors, and policymakers minimize the occasions when students must participate in standardized testing. (5 references) (EJS)

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CRITICAL ISSUES
IN
STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

HELPING STUDENTS ACHIEVE:

Implications for Roles and Responsibilities

Paper Number 5
Fall 1990

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Helping Students Achieve: Implications for Roles and Responsibilities

Improving student achievement is of major concern to students, parents, educators, business/industry leaders, and other members of communities throughout the United States. During the past decade, it has become the focus of efforts to change or restructure our educational system. For the past three years the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) has been active in these efforts through its project, "Facilitating Student Achievement in Reading, Writing, and Thinking, with Partnerships and Technology." One of the major tasks in this project has been the production of a series of papers exploring critical issues related to student achievement. This paper is the fifth and final of our series. It discusses the affect of standardized testing on student achievement and concludes with some recommended roles for students, parents, teachers, administrators, community members and policymakers to consider in helping to increase achievement for all students. A summary of the four previous papers is provided for awareness about their foci in relationship to the culminating discussion of this document.

The first paper, "An Integrated Approach to Facilitating Student Achievement" (Summer, 1988), introduced the project. The emphasis of this paper was on the current movement toward educational reform, which has been driven by concern for the future of the U.S. economy, state legislation, and social factors such as changing family structure and demographics.

Our second paper, "A New Look at Student Achievement" (Winter, 1988), defined student achievement in terms of a three-dimensional framework encompassing factors relating to (1) the student; (2) the educational context; and (3) the socio-economic milieu or the community.

A third paper, "A Look at Student Achievement from the School Dimension: Demythologizing Standardized Tests" (Spring, 1989), explored issues related to the use of standardized tests as indicators of student achievement.

The fourth paper, "Bridging the Gap Between Business and Education: Reconciling Expectations for Student Achievement" (Spring, 1990), explored the relationship between schools and the community, specifically focusing on private enterprise.

This, the fifth and final paper in our series entitled, "Helping Students Achieve: Implications for Roles and Responsibilities," will provide information about the roles and responsibilities of students and other key persons

in facilitating academic achievement. It discusses (1) the problems students experience as a result of ineffective assessments of their achievement, (2) some implications for educational improvement emerging from these problems, and (3) several recommendations for ways that students, parents, teachers, administrators, community members, and policymakers can help to improve student achievement. The paper is less theoretical and research-based than previous ones because it is written to re-emphasize key roles necessary in facilitating successful student achievement.

Traditionally schools have communicated information about achievement to students in terms of their performance on tests, both teacher-developed and standardized. In turn, students generally understand the extent of their success or failure in school based on teacher feedback regarding their class participation and test scores.

Currently, tests are being used for a variety of reasons, not all of which are related to helping students perform well in their courses or reaching their educational goals (Medina & Neill, 1988). For instance, standardized test results are used as an indicator of school accountability, and also to track students, label them, or place them in special programs. Such uses of test outcomes can adversely affect students' educational goals and contribute to their disengagement from schools and education.

Frequently students are faced with the serious problem of relating what they are doing in schools with what they will be or want to be doing in later life. Results from tests often fail to provide many of them with these kinds of insights. In addition many teachers do not provide adequate feedback to help students improve their school performance. Further complicating this problem is the lack of communication between members of the broader community and members of the school community that also prevents many students from obtaining useful information about workplace knowledge and skills. As a result, neither the skills being taught nor those being addressed are contributors to real student achievement.

This problem is often exacerbated by the mismatch between subjects and courses presented in schools and requirements of the workplace as well as society. Other than in vocational education programs, schools traditionally have focused on teaching basic skills as academic subjects instead of emphasizing how such skills apply to the workplace. Such a focus evolved in a system of education designed to serve all students, not all of whom would enter the workplace upon graduation.

The pervasiveness of test use in American schools is difficult for most citizens to comprehend. For example, during the 1986-87 school year, educa-

tors in our schools reported that somewhere between 95 to 105 million standardized tests were given to about 39.8 million elementary and secondary public school students. This estimate does not include tests administered to identify or place gifted or limited-English proficient students. Nor does it include tests taken by private and parochial school students (Medina & Neil, 1988).

With such widespread use of testing, public schools have begun to treat standardized tests as the all-encompassing answer for promoting student achievement and ensuring school accountability. As a result, standardized tests have become the rule of thumb for making many important educational decisions that affect students, teachers, and schools. For example, many schools use standardized tests as gatekeepers for such decisions as (1) student promotions, (2) high school graduation, (3) teacher merit pay, and (4) fund allocation for schools as well as school districts. In the process, tests significantly affect educational goals, teaching and learning, student progress and achievement, and local control of schools, thereby creating a new set of problems in each of these areas (Medina & Neil, 1988).

Depending excessively on test scores to shape the direction of education, determine its content, and communicate educational progress fails to help:

1. students understand the value of education;
2. parents understand the role of schools in preparing students to become productive citizens;
3. educators make appropriate decisions about what students ought to know and be able to do;
4. community members understand the process of education; and
5. policymakers broaden their vision about the mission of the educational system.

One approach to solving this dilemma is for students, parents, teachers, administrators, community members, and policymakers to work more closely together. Through such collaboration, these stakeholders can help schools become environments conducive to promoting and increasing achievement for all students. Students can then better appreciate the purpose and value of their educational accomplishments, increase their expectations for academic success, and motivate their performance in its attainment.

Collaboration means that everyone will have certain responsibilities for improving student achievement. Though neither all-new nor all-inclusive,

the following recommended responsibilities for students, parents, teachers, administrators, community members, and policymakers can serve to reinforce the importance of key roles for increasing achievement among all students.

Recommended responsibilities for students:

- Attend school every day, actively participate in class.
- Come to school ready and willing to learn.
- Set educational and life goals with help from others.
- Work to be the best that you can be.
- Ask for help when needed to complete assignments or clarify understandings.
- Establish good study habits, and develop alternative learning strategies.
- Complete homework assignments fully.
- Ask for feedback about areas in which you need improvement.
- Develop enjoyable hobbies or participate in extra-curricular activities to support or enrich learning.
- Talk with adults who are in the career fields that interest you.

Recommended responsibilities for parents:

- Provide children with food, shelter, health, and emotional security to ensure their well being and learning readiness.
- Help children establish high expectations, set their goals for school, career, and classroom performance.
- Encourage children to develop hobbies and participate in extra-curricular activities.
- Compliment and reward all student efforts to learn, rather than focusing exclusively on grades.
- Build self-esteem and learning confidence.

- Set home policies and environments that emphasize the value of education and the importance of study.
- Help children select courses to meet their goals.
- Demand feedback about all aspects of childrens' performance from teachers and administrators.
- Visit and participate in children's classrooms and schools.
- Be active in school organizations and other groups to provide input for school programs and policies.

Recommended responsibilities for teachers:

- Set clear goals and objectives for learning expectations and outcomes in grades, subjects, units, or courses.
- Teach students, not content.
- Use varied methods of instruction.
- Use varied methods of assessment.
- Provide a variety of learning experiences or opportunities.
- Help students develop problem-solving skills.
- Talk with students and parents about classroom performance and educational decisions.
- Assess student performance in relation to classroom/school goals and objectives.
- Help students develop metacognitive (thinking about their thinking) skills.
- Challenge and provide opportunities for all students to excel.
- Create classroom environments that stimulate learning and promote achievement.

Recommended responsibilities for administrators:

- Create school environments that promote successful teaching and learning.

- Set clear instructional, learning, and assessment goals.
- Inform parents and community members to avoid misuse or misinterpretation of standardized test data.
- Provide information forums about educational issues and efforts to motivate community involvement.
- Promote parent involvement in all phases of school activities and programs.
- Make schools inviting places for students, parents, and community members.
- Be receptive to input and support from parents and community members.
- Provide staff development opportunities for teachers and parents/community members.
- Keep abreast of developments about effective instructional and assessment methods.
- Provide incentives to stimulate student learning.
- Provide evidence regularly about student achievement to students, parents, and community members.

Recommended responsibilities for community members:

- Serve as student mentors and/or tutors.
- Support activities and programs that enhance student self-confidence and self-esteem.
- Encourage companies, industries, businesses, and other community entities to offer student internships, donate scientific and technological equipment, sponsor instructional programs (e.g., math and science), and train teachers/administrators.
- Serve on committees and/or task forces to improve education and the delivery of basic health/social services to students.

Recommended responsibilities of policymakers:

- Create an environment that promotes effective teaching and learning policies.
- State clearly the purpose and indicators of school accountability.
- Minimize the occasions when students must participate in standardized testing.
- Establish incentives for developing and/or using a broader range of assessment strategies.
- Develop policies that directly link state education mission and goals, curriculum and instruction, and assessment of student progress or achievement.

The goals and perceptions of students are as important as those of parents, educators, community members, and policymakers in determining what will be taught and how. While often overlooked in the school achievement equation, students are primary determinants of how they will perform. Schools must avoid the over-reliance on standardized tests that narrow the curriculum; frustrate teachers; drive students to lower school performance or out of school; and undermine school improvement as well as student achievement rather than advancing them. In order for students to aspire to and reach high levels of educational achievement, they must be supported by parents and teachers as well as by the broader community. Thus, while students must assume more responsibility for their achievement, parents, teachers, and the other adults in their lives must be responsible for creating the conditions most conducive to their success in education and in life.

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